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WASHINGTON STATE, HEALTH INSURANCE CARRIERS WORK TOGETHER TO IMPROVE CHILDREN'S HEALTH CARE

OLYMPIA, Wash. – An effort to improve preventive health care for low-income children is paying off for Washington State.

Washington State Medicaid program, a half dozen health insurance carriers, and 11 Western Washington clinics have been working together this year on a Children's Preventive Healthcare Initiative (CPHI) aimed at increasing well-child exam rates and ensuring that more young children in the program receive their immunizations.

Brandi Varnell, RN, Nurse Manager for the Community Health Center of Snohomish County Broadway Clinics in Everett, said her center is seeing as much as a 10 percent jump in immunization rates in a single month this summer, thanks to better notification procedures and putting a higher priority on results via the use of statewide immunization registries like CHILD Profile.

"By utilizing our CHILD Profile patient database, we were able to notify parents about CHC's dedicated walk-in immunization clinics just before school started, and to make them aware of their child's current immunization status. We had nurses giving injections all day long! We had an incredible response!"

Barbara Lantz, RN, Contract Manager for CPHI with the Medical Assistance Administration (MAA), said discussions and shared ideas in training sessions are paying off because the clinics are able to explore new ways to get children in for preventive care. "Clinics are using the Washington State immunization registry, health plan data, and clinic billing systems to identify children due for physical exams and immunizations and employing methods such as reminder postcards and telephone calls to get kids in for care."

CPHI Learning Labs

The series of training sessions for clinics began in May in Burlington, Tacoma and Vancouver. A new Learning Lab will be held in Tacoma on Friday, Sept. 19, at Regence BlueShield's Tacoma offices, 1501 Market St.; another will be held in Vancouver on Sept. 26 at Columbia United Providers headquarters, 19120 SE 34th St., Suite 201.

Clinics or providers who want more information can call 503-279-0100 or e-mail:

CPHI@ompro.org

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"I think everyone feels this has moved the process ahead," Lantz said

On Friday (September 19) in Tacoma and on September 26 in Vancouver, CPHI is holding a third "Learning Lab," a discussion and idea exchange between the 11 participating clinics, all of whom treat children in the Medicaid managed care program called *Healthy Options*. The project is coordinated by OMPRO, a health-care quality-improvement organization.

The discussions include ideas for better education of families, parental reminders about developmental milestones, or other care issues that should be tracked once a child becomes a Medicaid client. Some projects under way in the clinics include postcard reminders to parents when children miss appointments; follow-up phone calls by clinic staff; and positive incentives for families that do make appointments, such as gift certificates to a local store.

The participating health insurance carriers are all contractors with *Healthy Options*. They include Regence BlueShield of Washington, Regence's Spokane subsidiary Asuris Northwest Health, Premiera Blue Cross, Community Health Plan of Washington, Columbia United Providers, and Molina Healthcare of Washington. Under their contracts with the state, the health plans contribute resources and funds to support programs like CPHI.

Dr. Carl A. Plonsky of Union Avenue Pediatrics will speak at both Learning Labs this month about his own clinic's experience and the group Well Child parent education sessions that helped his clinic earn one of the best records for preventive care in Washington's Medicaid program last year. Union Avenue Pediatrics and Olson Pediatrics in Spokane earned top scores by ranking in the top 25 percent of clinics for all three age groups reviewed in the study.

"Anticipatory guidance and education" sessions for parents are part of every Well Child exam, but Dr. Plonsky's clinic developed its own model to bring in groups of parents for joint briefings and discussions. In that atmosphere, mutual concerns can be explored, parents can learn from their health care provider and each other, and the parents may even become a support system for each other.

The sessions include information about childhood development in general as well as strategies to help parents know what to expect as their children grow older and how the Well Child exam's developmental screening can spot challenges and potential problems in the future.

The 11 participating clinics this year include: Community Health Centers in Everett; Skagit Valley Medical Center, Sea Mar-Bellingham, Sea Mar-Vancouver, Columbia Public Health and Harborview in Seattle; The Vancouver Clinic, Healthy Steps Women and Children's Clinic, Family Wellness Center, and Family Medicine Southwest, Vancouver; and Child & Adolescent Clinic, Longview.

Lantz said the state's budget crunch made it difficult to enroll Eastern Washington clinics this year but that MAA plans to expand the program into either the Yakima or Spokane areas in 2004.

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND BACKGROUND:

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LEARNING LABS: Clinics or providers interested in finding out more about future learning labs or CPHI programs may call **Kathy Phipps** or **Anita Bobinet** at OMPRO, 503-279-0100 or e-mail CPHI@ompro.org